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AUTHOR Heimlich, Joe E.; Puglisi, Dawn D.
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ABSTRACT

Funds are not always available to finance environmental education efforts in communities and schools. This digest highlights steps for identifying potential sources for funding and how to apply for those funds. Two sources of monetary awards to groups and individuals are grants and gifts. Four steps to identify potential donors and apply for support are given: (1) define the objectives of your project; (2) search for funding sources; (3) select sources that fit your project by considering timelines for proposal submission, interests of the foundation, geographic limitations, and past projects funded; and (4) tailor your proposal to the potential donor by reading funding source materials carefully, emulating their writing style, following application instructions, being explicit about project outcomes, proposing unique project qualities, and applying ideas from proposal writing reference materials. Contains a list of 15 references for writing proposal grants. (MDH)

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Finding Funding for Environmental Education Efforts

Joe E. Heimlich & Dawn D. Puglisi

Communities and schools frequently find that some part of their physical environmental may need action to improve it. A group may decide to do a site cleanup, undertake beautification of an area, create a land laboratory, or establish a community education campaign on a current issue of interest.

Sometimes, the creative process runs into the cold hard fact that there are limited local financial resources to fund the effort. This digest will highlight steps in identifying potential sources for funding and how to apply for those funds.

Types of Sources

The two most common types of monetary awards to groups and individuals are: (1) grants and (2) gifts. Gifts are donations of monies or in-kind services or goods made to individuals or groups for which there is no expectation of outcome by the giver. A fast-food restaurant's donation of beverages to a work-group and a local philanthropist's gift of money to what is personally viewed as a "worthy" cause are outright gifts. A grant, on the other hand, is usually awarded to a group or individual based on the perceived merits of a proposed project. For small efforts, a gift is often more expeditious and easier to obtain than a grant.

For larger and more expensive projects, a grant is usually more appropriate. Grants are offered by governments, foundations (usually affiliated with an industry or company, institutions, or organizations.

Sometimes, grants are awarded based on needs of the funder. In these cases the contractors request proposals from the group or individual seeking funding based on parameters that the funder explicitly states when offering funding. For most groups interested in environmental projects, it is more likely that a foundation that awards grants based on individual consideration of the proposal will fund a project.

There are various ways to identify foundations that may fund an environmental project and to apply for funding. The process has four steps.

STEP ONE: Define your project

Before looking for monetary support, it is important that the group identify what it wants to do or accomplish. This step helps the group avoid "chasing after money," which is often a fruitless effort and requires a great deal of time. The group should determine what it wants to do in the terms of goals and outcomes.

What are the goals of the project? Very often, groups make the mistake of identifying goals as what will be done, rather than the real goal. Creating signage for a nature trail is not a goal, but a means of accomplishing the goal of having good signage along the nature trail. Goals are the end result of what the group will do. And goals have outcomes.

Outcomes drive the goals. Using the above example, why is good signage important? The outcome might be that there is improved probability that users of the nature trail will understand what they are observing. Another outcome might be the availability ot information along the trail that is not visually disruptive or that blends into the environment. Agreement within the group on goals and outcomes of the project is important before the group even begins to look for funding opportunities.

How extensive is the group effort to be? Realistically, what are group members willing to do? The extensiveness of the project must be determined before asking for funding. Few, if any, foundations will award money to fund a project where the group requesting the funding does not do any of the work. The commitment of the group must be reflected in a realistic project.

Finally, the group needs to establish a realistic time line for completing the project. In initial discussions, talk among the group members should reflect how long people will be willing to commit to a particular project and how long actual work on the project will take, including time for unplanned occurrences! Most grants are awarded on dates determined by the granter, and there is a "lag" time between submission and awarding of monies.

STEP TWO: Search for Funding Sources

There are many reference tools to help a group get started in identifying possible funding sources. The list of references at the end of this digest is a good place to start. In addition, local organizations and local and state government agencies often have grant programs that may not appear in references. It is well worth the time invested to talk with environmental associations in your area to discover if they are aware of additional funding sources.

STEP THREE: Select Sources that Fit Your Project

Just because a foundation awards money for environmental projects does not mean that your project will fit within the foundation's guidelines for

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funding. Foundations and agencies have annual reports that describe what projects were funded each year. These reports describe the foundation's goals and also provide important information such as:

- the timeline for submitting grant applications or proposals.
- the current or emerging interests of the foundation.
- geographic limitations (if any) for funding projects.
- types of projects and descriptions of past projects funded.

Using this information and the information in the directories, you can identify the funder(s) most likely to fund your group's projects.

STEP FOUR: Tailor Your Proposal

There is no "magic formula" to writing a proposal or completing an application form. There are, however, some tips that can be offered:

- **Read the materials from the funding source carefully.** The language used, the style of writing, the urgency of the issues are all contained within the writing of the materials.
- **Emulate this writing style.** Use the type of language the funder used, but avoid "parroting" back exactly what the funder wrote. Respond to all the issues that are relevant. Include what you need to include, but avoid extraneous words, ideas, and materials.
- **Follow application instructions.** Carefully complete any application or proposal using the guidelines for the foundation or agency. Check and recheck to ensure that everything needed is included, and nothing extra is added.
- **Be explicit about the outcomes of the project.** Most agencies and foundations are interested in results. It is important to focus on what will happen as a result of this funding that will benefit your community, your group, society, and the funder. These outcomes are sometimes called "deliverables," meaning that upon completion of the project, there will be certain tangible items that the funder can see.
- **Be creative.** It is often the unique quality of a particular proposal or application that determines what projects secure funding. What is it that can make your particular project unique?
- **Use resources available.** There are many reference materials available on writing grants and application. It is worth the time for the writer(s) to review some of the suggestions in these materials.

Whatever happens, there are no guarantees. You may think that your project is perfect and that you may have a tremendously well-written application but yet not receive funding. Or another time, you may have a hastily written proposal that is funded. There are many factors outside your control that determine funding. The answer is to be prepared, do the best writing possible, and keep on trying!

Resources:

Bowhen, R. R. (1992). *Annual register of grant support: A directory of funding sources.* (Details grant support programs of government agencies, public and private foundations, community trusts as well as other funding sources.)

Coley, S. M., & Scheinberg (Eds.). (1990). *Proposal writing.*

Elmcki, S. E., & Romaniok, B. R. (Eds.). (1992). *America's new foundations: The sourcebook on recently created philanthropies.* (3300 private, corporate, and community foundations created since 1986. "Offers unique funding opportunities... these foundations smaller sizes and brief giving histories often cause them to be passed over, or not even considered...")

Environmental Grantmaking Foundations. (1992). (Includes text, grants data, and analysis of foundations that give environmental grants.)

Feczko, M. M., & Olsen, S. (Eds.). (1991). *Directory of new and emerging foundations.* (Lists grantmaking foundations established in the U.S. from 1985-1989.)

Feczko, M. M. & Olsen, S. (Eds.). (1993). *The Foundation Directory.* (Details giving interests of the nation's largest grantmaking foundation.)

Grants for elementary and secondary education. (1992). (Covers grants in the U.S. and abroad to private and public schools.)

Grants for environmental protection and animal welfare. (1992). Grants to nonprofit organizations. (Grant areas include natural resources, conservation, nature centers, zoos, and environmental education.)

Grants for women and girls. (1992). (Details grants for education, research, and service as well as giving information on subject areas of previous grants, geographic location, and name of successful awardees.)

Jankowski, K. E. (Eds.). (1992). *The directory of corporate and foundation givers: A national listing of the 8,000 major funding sources for nonprofits.* (Descriptive profiles tell whether a program is associated with a private foundation, corporate foundation, or a corporate direct giver.)

Kovacs, R., Hodges, D. & Tobiasen, C. (Eds.). (1992). *The foundation grants index 1993: A cumulative listing of foundation grants reported in 1991.* (Indices include: grant recipients, subject areas funded, geographic distribution, and type of support given.)

Lee, C. L. (1991). *National guide to funding for the environment and animal welfare.*

Margolin, J. B. (Eds.). (1991). *Foundation fundamentals: A guide for grantseekers.* (The Kid's Guide to Social Action. "How to solve the social problems you choose—and turn creative thinking into positive action.")

Olsen, S., Kovacs, & Haile, S. (Eds.). (1991). *National guide to funding for women and girls.* (Lists grants of $5,000 or more.)

Romaniok, B. (Ed.). (1992). *Corporate and foundation grants.* (A comprehensive listing of more than 95,000 recent grants to non-profit organizations in the U.S.)

Joe E. Heimlich is an Assistant Professor, Environmental Education in the School of Natural Resources, The Ohio State University and Environmental Education Associate for ERIC/CSMEE.

Dawn D. Puglisi is Assistant Director for ERIC/CSMEE.

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